United Nations S/PV.7777*

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7777th meeting
Sunday, 25 September 2016, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Schwalger	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

* Reissued for technical reasons

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-29803* (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: As the Secretary-General has said, these are indeed chilling days for Syria, and for the people of Aleppo in particular. The past week has been one of the worst ones in Syria during the nearly six years of this devastating conflict. Earlier in the week, I had to deeply regret the fact that the meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) did not yield the results we were hoping for, and actually saw an outcome that put in jeopardy the agreement reached in Geneva by the two co-Chairs on 9 September, which we believed, and want to continue to believe, was meant to reinvigorate the concept and the implementation of the cessation of hostilities.

The ISSG meeting took place in the middle of news that the Government of Syria had declared an offensive in eastern Aleppo — now de facto besieged. It came on the footsteps of two unrelated, but compounding, tragic events. One was the incident in Deir ez-Zor, the second one was the attack on a humanitarian convoy. I can only reiterate the concern expressed by the Secretary-General on the first incident, which was acknowledged as a tragic mistake by the United States, and our shared deep outrage about the deadly attack on the humanitarian convoy. But no incident, irrespective of whether it can be attributed or not, justifies what is taking place before of our own eyes, that is, the unravelling of the cessation of hostilities and the simultaneous unleashing of unprecedented military violence, which is affecting innocent civilians as well.

Let us recall briefly that, following the 9 September announcement of the agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States, which was a complicated agreement that took long time and required long evening and night discussions, the renewed cessation of hostilities that came into effect three days later did indeed reduce violence. Even Aleppo witnessed a reduction in military activities. We heard of families coming out of their shelters and houses to celebrate Eid on the streets. People started to become cautiously optimistic. But there was still sporadic shelling inside the city and some airstrikes in the countryside, but at a lower level.

Then, on 18 September, airstrikes resumed on Aleppo city, when five districts were hit, reportedly by five severe airstrikes. When the Government unilaterally declared the end of the cessation of hostilities on 19 September, we began to hear reports of the use of barrel bombs and airstrikes in eastern Aleppo, where, I want to remind everyone, 275,000 people are currently de facto trapped. Fair enough, there are 1.6 million people on the other side of Aleppo. But they are not isolated, like those in eastern Aleppo. Only minutes after the Government's announcement, our own team in Aleppo clearly heard the sounds of shelling and bombardment begin. They happened to be there because we had sent them to accompany and assist the truck convoy that was possibly meant to leave Turkey in order to get to eastern Aleppo via the Castello Road, .

As the Secretary-General has reported to the Council, on the evening of 19 September as well there was a horrific attack against a humanitarian convoy travelling to Oram Al-Kubra, killing 20 humanitarian Syrian workers and drivers, including the team leader, and destroying 18 out of 31 clearly identified trucks. We condemned that attack in the strongest terms, as did many members around this table, who have offered condolences and have been calling for an inquiry and accountability for those who committed that act.

Since that fateful day, we have seen the situation in eastern Aleppo deteriorate to new heights of horror. Amid intensive airstrikes reported on Friday, following the announcement of the beginning of a Government offensive — an announcement made by the Government itself — the community in opposition-controlled eastern Aleppo even called off their own Friday prayers. Information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

indicates dozens of airstrikes on Friday and Saturday, which hit residential buildings across the de facto besieged eastern Aleppo, reportedly causing scores of civilian deaths and injuries, including those of many children.

First responders appear overwhelmed and unable to respond to many of the sites. We have seen reports of three of the four centres operated by the White Helmets in eastern Aleppo being hit. As numbers of casualties are rising, rescue workers struggle to remove people from under the rubble. Even tools that might have been able to mitigate some of the suffering of civilians have reportedly been destroyed in the attacks against the civil defence stations. Information received from sources on the ground suggest the following numbers to date, allegedly due to airstrikes on areas held by armed opposition groups. We cannot verify them, but these are the figures we are seeing at the moment: 213 fatalities in Aleppo province, 139 fatalities in eastern Aleppo and 74 fatalities in rural Aleppo, all including dozens of women and children.

How many airstrikes? Obviously, we have no independent capacity to verify that. Sources on the ground tell us that they no longer have the capacity to count them accurately, given the chaos in Aleppo city and the fact they often take place at night and with remarkable new intensity. We heard the word "unprecedented" used to describe the quantity, scale and type of bombing. We have seen reports, videos and pictures of the reported use of incendiary bombs that create fireballs of such intensity that they light up the pitch darkness in eastern Aleppo, as though it were actually daylight. We now hear of bunker-busting bombs being used, and see pictures of large craters in the ground much larger than in previous aerial bombings. If it is confirmed, the systematic indiscriminate use of such weapons in areas where civilians and civilian infrastructure are present may amount to war crimes. Civilians across town must be asking themselves where on Earth it is now safe to be in that tormented city.

We have also seen reports of armed opposition groups firing hellfire rockets. Do members know what they are? They are basically gas canisters full of nails, stones and iron, which are being launched in a rudimentary way across the other side of the line. These do in fact kill civilians, including one which hit the Al-Maari school in Hamidiya neighbourhood on 22 September. On 19 September, the area close to the United Nations hub in western Aleppo was hit by two mortar shells coming from the opposition, killing one civilian.

There are ongoing reports that medical centres are being targeted, including an alleged strike on an ambulance and medical triage centre in an area held by armed opposition groups in south-western Aleppo, which also caused fatalities among medical staff once again. We hear of streets so filled with rubble — huge piles of rubble — due to these new types of bombs that ambulances cannot even pass through them.

As I mentioned at the beginning, up to 275,000 people in eastern Aleppo — and, frankly, they cannot all be terrorists — have now been under a form of de facto siege for almost 20 days, since the Al-Ramouseh corridor was closed and after the Castello Road was blocked on 7 July. Since that closure, the humanitarian situation has taken a turn for the worse. In essence, supplies are running out. World Food Programme (WFP) stocks inside eastern Aleppo amount to only 12,000 food rations, which means sufficient supplies for 60,000 out of 275,000 people. There is no prospect for replenishing them, since both roads are blocked. Bakeries are being hit and bread is available only for three days a week, which could decrease again in coming days. There is a lack of fuel for general public use, thereby reducing availability for transport services, private wells and household use, especially for cooking.

As the Security Council is aware, the United Nations and WFP had planned to send a convoy to eastern Aleppo at the beginning of the renewed cessation of hostilities. WFP mobilized a convoy of 40 trucks — I have the pictures here — which have been ready and waiting to go every morning at 5 o'clock, loaded with supplies sufficient to provide full food rations for approximately 35,000 people, and wheat flour assistance for an additional 130,000 people of the 275,000. We all know what happened. The convoy never moved because it never received sufficient guarantees — frankly, let us be honest — from either side, and the cessation of hostilities broke down. Complicated arguments were raised by the Government, such as driving licences suddenly becoming crucial in the conflict. On the opposition side, arguments were made asking for all sorts of impossible conditions in order to make sure we would have the guarantees. Obviously, there was hesitation on both sides to see the convoy moving, and we saw the result of that.

Currently, 2 million people have no access to running water through the public network, after intense fighting stopped the flow of water from the two key pumping stations that service the population in both the eastern and western parts of the city. On 22 September, the Bab Al-Nairab water pumping station, which serves the eastern part of the city, was reportedly hit by airstrikes. In retaliation, Jaish Al-Fateh turned off water to 1.5 million people in the western part of the city. There is therefore no water, in a grave tit-for-tat type of move. Luckily, water is now back on more regularly, we hope, after difficult last-minute negotiations led by UNICEF. However, people in eastern Aleppo still remain at risk due to interruptions to safe drinking water. Water from wells, which used to be plentiful, has become highly contaminated due to the conflict. People, particularly vulnerable children, are at risk of catastrophic outbreaks of water-borne diseases. God forbid: that is the last thing we need at a moment like this.

If nothing else, from a humanitarian point of view, we ask the Security Council, first, to press for a cessation of the violence and for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure; secondly, to press for weekly 48-hour pauses in the fighting to ensure at least that the United Nations and its partners can reach eastern Aleppo, without preconditions from either the Government or, frankly, from the opposition; and, thirdly, to press for medical evacuations. There are several urgent cases in eastern Aleppo at the moment.

Returning to the military situation on the ground, we have seen several accounts of almost every event. There are reports of the Government announcing its intention to retake all of Aleppo city. Shortly after the agreement announced in Geneva by Russia and the United States at almost midnight on 9 September, President Al-Assad visited what was left of Darayya and announced his intention to "liberate every inch of Syria". Furthermore, we saw reports that indicated that the reported objective of Government and pro-Government forces was to "squeeze out terrorists without civilian casualties" and to maintain a corridor for fighters to leave eastern Aleppo. However, what we are seeing is civilians dying in large numbers.

The last few days have seen intense military clashes on major front lines, including Handrat, Sheikh Said, Old Aleppo, Old Ramousa and Hammadiah districts. Yesterday, Government forces said they had taken over Handrat district, north of the city, a claim that armed opposition groups now dispute. Whatever the case, it is a fact that there has been heavy fighting there. There were contradictory statements from the opposition as to whether counter-offensives were being led by the Al-Nusra Front or by Fateh Haleb Operations Room of Free Syrian Army groups. We have seen information from other sources that tells us that more than half of the fighters present in eastern Aleppo are Al-Nusra. We have also seen reports alleging the intentional placement of firing positions close to social infrastructure and inside civilian quarters. We have seen that in other conflicts, but it is not a reason for anyone to destroy the whole building.

The one constant in this violently unpredictable conflict is that neither side will win, and therefore both ultimately will lose. Above all, the Syrian people are going to lose, they are losing their lives day by day. All we can expect in Aleppo if the Syrian Government is intent on retaking it completely — and this is a military analysis done by people far more competent than us — is a slow, grinding, street-by-street fight over the course of months, if not years, whereby the ancient city will be almost completely destroyed. In the face of these illusions of imminent victory, I must reiterate what we now believe to be an almost self-evident truth, but a truth that does not seem to be actually implemented: a so-called military solution or victory in Syria is impossible, including in Aleppo.

Syrians on all sides are still making clear their demand for a ceasefire and a credible political solution. But trust is seriously broken. On 9 September, in Geneva that night, I remember very much both Sergey Lavrov and John Kerry being concerned about it, saying they could not go on making statements that did not have follow-up. But I want to believe — because I am still a naïve United Nations official — that they really meant what they said and that they really negotiated hard, comma by comma, because they wanted it work. But frankly, the international community and the Syrians are swiftly losing any remaining hope, and the international community is losing any credibility with the parties, unless we salvage what was agreed upon. A tiny window of opportunity still exists, and we want to believe that it does, for the Russian Federation and the United States to help the Syrians and the region step away from the brink of more years of a bloody conflict risks becoming even worse.

On Wednesday (see S/PV.7774) I reported to the Security Council that the Secretary-General had asked

me to present to the sides a framework of proposals as a starting point for negotiations in resumed talks, as requested by the ISSG co-Chairs. I am ready to do just that. But the ISSG and the co-Chairs, and the Council itself — and as suggested in an important comment made by the Chinese Foreign Minister at the ISSG meeting on Thursday — the Council has a responsibility to ensure the relaunching of the cessation of hostilities and its implementation without delay, with all the risks and difficulties that entails.

We all know that this conflict cannot be resolved through negotiations without the help and assistance of the co-Chairs and the region. I am therefore asking, indeed urging, both of them to go the extra mile to see if they can save their agreement of 9 September, and do so at the eleventh hour. The agreement not only provides some basis for the resumption of talks, it also provides a broader framework for how to combat terrorism — we have no doubts about that, and I want to believe we all agree on that — and to de-conflict the region more generally, as well as for grounding the Syrian air force, as that too was part of the agreement.

My appeal to the Council today is the following: please, develop a common course of action to enforce a cessation of hostilities in Syria. I am still convinced that we can turn the course of events. We have proved that more than once before. We have come a long way to date to allow the small but tangible achievements of the cessation of hostilities to be buried under the dust of Aleppo's rubble.

I have been repeatedly asked by many,

> "Mr. De Mistura, why do you not resign at this point? Frankly, all this is leading nowhere and this will send a strong signal."

No, I will not, because any sign of my resigning would be a sign that the international community was abandoning the Syrians. The United Nations will never abandon the Syrians, and neither will the Council. We do not need that kind of sign, which would make news for five minutes. And then not only would Syria be abandoned by everyone, but so too the hope that the international community does want to end the conflict.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for being here and for his refusal to give up.

We have convened the Security Council today because the Russian Federation and the Al-Assad regime have launched an all-out air and ground offensive against eastern Aleppo and its 275,000 civilians. Russia and Al-Assad have reportedly launched more than 150 airstrikes over the past 72 hours, killing at least 139 people and injuring hundreds more and laying waste to what is left of an iconic Middle Eastern city. These are people who have suffered horribly in the five and a half years of war, yet they call the attacks from the air "unprecedented in quantity and quality." The Al-Assad regime is explicit: it believes only in a military solution. It says it is going to conquer militarily every last square inch of Syria. And it does not care what is left of Syria in pursuing that military solution.

Instead of pursuing peace, Russia and Al-Assad make war. Instead of helping get lifesaving aid to civilians, Russia and Al-Assad are bombing humanitarian convoys, hospitals and first responders, who are trying desperately to keep people alive. Russia will argue today, no doubt, that those attacks are meant to fight terrorism and that the people killed in this offensive are terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. That is absurd. Look at the facts. In the first 24 hours of their assault on eastern Aleppo — an assault, I would note, whose first strikes were carried out in the middle of meetings here in New York in which Russia was saying it wanted to recommit to a cessation of hostilities — Russia and the regime struck not one, not two, but three of the four bases used by the White Helmet volunteers in eastern Aleppo.

The White Helmets are first responders who bravely rush to the scene of bombings to dig through the rubble for survivors. Every day, they save lives by driving ambulances and fire trucks and, where there are no roads left, running on foot to the homes, schools, hospitals and markets that Russia and Al-Assad have attacked. The White Helmets continue to do that even though they know that the regime routinely carries out now-infamous double-tap airstrikes — in which they strike a target, wait for first responders to arrive and then strike again. A month ago, the world was shocked by the dazed stare of 5-year-old Omran Daqneesh as he sat in the back of an ambulance after his home was bombed. He was rescued by White Helmets. But because of Russia and Al-Assad's attacks these past few days,

fewer kids like Omran are going to be rescued. Those buried alive in rubble in eastern Aleppo are much more likely to die in rubble.

Another target that the latest Russia/Al-Assad offensive struck at its outset was the Bab Al-Nairab pumping station, as we have heard, which supplies drinking water to the people in eastern Aleppo. As a result, two months after the Al-Assad regime cut off eastern Aleppo from deliveries of food, medicine and humanitarian aid, residents will now be at risk of disease and infection as they drink whatever dirty, untreated water they can find. I would note that an opposition group also turned off a nearby pumping station that supplies water to some of the more than 1.5 million people in western Aleppo, which we condemn. Water should never be used as a weapon of war, and Aleppo's residents should not be forced to drink water that makes them sick, wherever they live. This is obscene.

Eastern Aleppo remains under siege as we convene here today. It seems the only items making it into eastern Aleppo these days are barrel bombs and incendiaries, which witnesses report seeing dropped by Al-Assad's forces and Russian forces. The combined impact on civilians of relentless airstrikes and blockades is crushing. Fuel for diesel generators, the main source of electricity, is running out. Within a week, there may not be enough power to keep producing bread. Hospitals, which have already relocated emergency rooms to basements and bunkers in an attempt to protect their patients from routine airstrikes, can barely keep the lights on. Because the electricity is so often knocked out, doctors have learned to conduct operations by the light of their cell phones. Yet each new airstrike brings them more and more maimed civilians, who they are forced to treat with fewer and fewer supplies.

Look at the photos that people in eastern Aleppo posted online in the past two days: Syrians slumped in blood-spattered hallways; men, women and children covered in rags and lying in pools of blood in makeshift hospitals; unconscious babies who need someone to pump oxygen into their lungs manually when generators fail. And if those victims need specialist treatment, they cannot get it. Even worse, they cannot leave eastern Aleppo. They are trapped — savagely, medievally. The United Nations assembled a convoy of trucks to deliver aid to eastern Aleppo more than a week ago, but it remains blocked by the fighting, unable to drive into that inferno.

Russia, of course, has long had the power to stop this suffering. The United States worked with Russia for eight painstaking months to develop an arrangement that included a renewed commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Just last week, the United States sponsored two ministerial meetings of the International Syria Support Group aimed at halting the violence and returning to a cessation of hostilities. We did so not because we think Russia has acted in good faith in Syria; we know as well as anyone that Russia has consistently said one thing and done the opposite. We did so because we know that there can be no peace in Syria if Russia is determined to keep fighting this war. We believe that we must do everything in our power to find a way to halt the violence and get on the path to a political transition, which is the only way to end this conflict. That is why, even now, we will continue to look for any way possible to restore the cessation of hostilities.

But it is common sense: a one-sided cessation of hostilities cannot hold. You cannot carry out a massive military offensive and say you are for peace. That might work on Russia Today, but it does not work when the world has reams of evidence proving exactly what Russia is doing. Last Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sat in this Chamber and declared that, when it comes to Syria,

> "Russia has consistently advocated an exclusively peaceful solution." (*S/PV.7774, p. 6*)

Yet given when the offensive began, it is not unreasonable to think that Russian and Syrian forces were literally loading the incendiary munitions and barrel bombs onto their aircraft as Minister Lavrov spoke here of making peace. The next day, after Russia and the regime began to rain its bombs down on civilians in eastern Aleppo, Minister Lavrov told the press that plans for a cessation of hostilities must be saved. This is Russia's approach to saving the cessation of hostilities? As the United Nations has said repeatedly, including today, these airstrikes on residential neighborhoods may well be war crimes.

Russia today will no doubt again accuse the United States of causing all of this chaos. They might point to the single airstrike in which the counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant coalition appears to have struck a Syrian military position — a strike that we immediately acknowledged and committed to investigating in full. Russia will likely try to divert from its own actions by

invoking United States actions elsewhere in the past. What members can be sure that Russia will not do today, or any day, is accept any responsibility for its actions. What members can be sure that Russia will not do is tell the truth.

I urge my fellow members of the Security Council to look at the remarks that they have brought today and to ask themselves, "Does what I am about to read reflect the gruesome facts on the ground? Does it speak candidly to who is unleashing this appalling violence? Would I feel comfortable reading these remarks to a Chamber packed with the residents of eastern Aleppo being besieged by Al-Assad's forces and by Russia?" If not, I urge them to speak directly to Syria's grim reality and the people who must live with it day in and day out.

This is not the day or the time to blame all sides or to draw false equivalencies. It is not the time to use the passive voice that is so common here in the Security Council. It is not the time to say that "airstrikes took place" or that "civilians were killed". It is time to say who is carrying out those airstrikes and who is killing civilians.

Russia holds a permanent seat on the Security Council. That is a privilege and it is a responsibility. Yet in Syria and in Aleppo, Russia is abusing this historic privilege. And while members of the Council — certainly including the United States — have a deep interest in having constructive ties with the Russian Federation, history will not look kindly on those Council members who stay silent in the face of this carnage.

Russia would have the Council live in upside-down land, where bombing first responders, cutting off humanitarian aid and supporting a murderous regime is billed as counter-terrorism. Let us be clear. There are terrorists in Syria — lots of them —and all of us have an interest in destroying them. They pose a threat to all of our citizens. That is why the United States leads a 67-country coalition that has rolled back 40 per cent of ISIL's territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria, and which each week liberates more desperate civilians. That is why the United States negotiated the recent agreement with Russia, signaling that we were prepared to work with Russia to fight Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIL in Syria. Nobody has to convince the United States of America of the danger posed by terrorists. Our citizens are often priority targets all around the world. But when Russia is espousing fiction, we have to call that out. What Russia is sponsoring and doing is not counter-terrorism; it is barbarism.

Let me conclude. On Friday, footage emerged of the aftermath of one of the many recent airstrikes in eastern Aleppo. In the video, first responders dig through the rubble of what was once a building, throwing aside chunks of concrete, and then suddenly one hears on the video the piercing scream of a child — a child literally submerged in concrete and rubble. The first responders then begin to dig more frantically, until the head and blue and white shirt of the little girl emerges — a girl crying out in pain and in terror. Eventually, tenderly, the first responders remove the rubble from around her and pull that girl – five-year-old Rawan Alowsh – from the wreckage, her body covered in white dust. It feels like a miracle, watching her come out alive.

And yet, everyone else in Rawan's immediate family was reportedly killed in that airstrike: her mother, her father and her four siblings, all killed. What chance does Rawan have in this world? What chance does she have with no family, but also with not even a single sign that her attackers have a shred of empathy in them? When violent attacks against civilians are surging; when norms of civilized behaviour that we have spent more than 70 years trying to build are being trampled; when there is complete impunity for targeting aid convoys, civilian, residential neighbourhoods, children and hospitals — impunity — what chance does Rawan or any of us have?

One first responder said of the relentless assault of the last few days: "People do not know what to do or where to go. There is no escape. It feels like the end of the world." The end of the world. It is apocalyptic, what is being done to eastern Aleppo. Surely, for Rawan — who at five years old has lost her entire family — the Council can at the very least have the courage to say who is responsible for this and, in a single voice, tell Russia to stop.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France, alongside the United States and the United Kingdom, asked for this emergency meeting to be convened because the information we have received from Aleppo marks a new height in the military escalation and a further descent into the abyss that characterize the tragedy in Syria. This information, corroborated by the statement made just now by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura — whom, on behalf of France, I thank for his involvement — attests

to a level of violence that has certainly never been attained in five years of a conflict that, I recall, is the greatest humanitarian tragedy since the Second World War.

Folllowing the unspeakable attack on a humanitarian convoy last Monday, on Thursday the regime — with the support of its backers — launched a major air offensive the clear objective of which is to bring Aleppo to its knees as soon as possible. The streets of Aleppo are no longer anything but a heap of ruins. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, hundreds of victims — including many children — have have been massacred in three days by the regime's bombs. As we speak, 275,000 civilians remain prisoners in the city and live in terror of indiscriminate bombing by the Syrian regime and its active supporters.

We are horrified by this new military gambit of the Syrian regime, which has persisted for months in trying to take Aleppo with the help of its supporters. Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the regime indiscriminately bombs homes, maternity clinics, hospitals, schools, refugee camps and neighbourhoods held by the moderate opposition. While the international community has sought for months to secure a truce, the Al-Assad regime has tirelessly violated international humanitarian law, the resolutions of the Security Council and the most basic principles of humanity.

In many ways, Aleppo is to Syria what Sarajevo was to Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Guernica to the Spanish Civil War — a symbolic city, a crossroads city, a martyred city. Aleppo, a symbolic city several thousand years old that has been declared a World Heritage site; a crossroads city, where so many countless cultures have met and mingled, has today become a martyred city. That symbol of civilization is under a siege that can only be called medieval. This is retrogressive and, frankly, shameful.

The information at our disposal indicates the systematic use of a new type of incendiary weapon and high-tech ammunition and subammunition that puncture bunkers and cause the collapse of an entire building in one impact. The use of such weapons against civilians should not surprise us, unfortunately, in the hands of a regime that has for many years bombarded its population with chlorine gas, phosphorus and explosive barrels. As the Secretary-General recalled yesterday, the indiscriminate and systematic use of such weapons in residential neighbourhoods constitutes a war crime — yes, a war crime — nd such a crime cannot go unpunished.

If we do nothing to prevent the total destruction of Aleppo, this week will be recalled as the moment when diplomacy failed and barbarity and brutality triumphed. The Council and the International Syria Support Group have met this week to seek an agreement on the cessation of hostilities and immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian aid. These discussions have not, for now, been unsuccessful. The military escalation now under way threatens the fragile hope for a truce in which we could still believe only a week ago. Russia imagines that it can restore the trust of its partners by negotiating a cessation of hostilities with one hand while supporting the regime that is bombarding Aleppo with the other.

Today, saving Aleppo must be our priority. A few weeks ago, Russia and the United States were able to agree to an operational plan for establishing a cessation of hostilities and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid. France supported the agreement, as it had supported all Vienna process initiatives to alleviate the suffering of civilians. The immediate implementation of that agreement, beginning with Aleppo, is our only hope and must therefore be our priority. France also calls for the establishment of a robust mechanism to monitor the cessation of hostilitiess, which alone can restore the necessary confidence and ensure the consolidation of the truce, first in Aleppo and then throughout the country. Through its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, my country has made detailed proposals to that end.

If there is one zone where the cessation of hostilities must be implemented on a priority basis, it is Aleppo. If there is one zone that the regime's aircraft must immediately be forbidden to overfly, it is Aleppo. If there is one zone where the people are urgently in need of emergency humanitarian assistance, it is Aleppo.

The Security Council is today at a moment of truth. It must rise to the immense responsibility that is incumbent upon it, and thus upon each of its members and all of us. We expect Russia in particular to give proof of its genuine readiness to stop supporting the military option and to truly seek a negotiated solution to the Syrian conflict with all the means and leverage at its disposal. If we wish to end the tragedy in Aleppo and Syria, we must ultimately put all our cards on the table, call things by their rightful names, and find a way

to unite around a collective approach. That is the only possible option, howsoever difficult it may be, to break the current deadlock and restore the political dynamic that is the only way to stop the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this emergency meeting today at the request of the United Kingdom, the United States and France. I join others in thanking Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and for his relentless stamina.

The Al-Assad regime and Russia are reducing Aleppo to rubble. Aleppo's inhabitants are ordinary Syrians who have suffered so much for so long. They are now facing an unprecedented, unrelenting onslaught of cruelty, and it is increasingly clear that it is an onslaught beyond the capabilities of the Syrian air force alone. After five years of conflict, one might think that the regime has had its fill of barbarity and that its sick blood lust against its own people has finally run its course.

But this weekend, the regime and Russia have instead plunged to new depths and unleashed a new hell on Aleppo. Bunker-busting bombs, more suited to destroying military installations, are now destroying homes, decimating bomb shelters, and crippling, maiming and killing dozens, if not hundreds. Incendiary munitions, indiscriminate in their reach, are being dropped onto civilian areas so that, yet again, Aleppo is burning. And to cap it all, water supplies so vital to millions are now being targeted, depriving water to those most in need. In short, it is difficult to deny that Russia is partnering with the Syrian regime to carry out war crimes.

Yet only four days ago (see S/PV.7774), we heard Foreign Minister Lavrov speak right here of Russia's commitment to a political, peaceful solution, and of Russia's commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Today, that commitment resembles much of Syria — broken and lifeless. The true meaning of that commitment can be seen on the ashen faces of the victims of Aleppo; on the faces of a mother clutching her child, crushed beneath the rubble; on the faces of the White Helmets and medics, injured or killed as they try desperately to save lives; and on the faces of every single man, woman and child who still calls Aleppo home. As the Secretary-General has said, these are dark days for the protection of civilians.

These devastating events underscore what we have known for so long. Russia needs to be salvaging, not stymieing efforts to restore the cessation of hostilities. Russia needs to be enabling, not attacking unfettered humanitarian assistance. And ultimately, Russia should be creating, not destroying the conditions necessary for the resumption of political talks. If it does not take these steps and more, Russia will only confirm its status as an international pariah. But in truth, as the horrific, unconscionable attack on the humanitarian convoy last week painfully illustrated, Russia simply has no credibility left on these issues.

Now Russia will no doubt try to deflect attention away from the crimes it is committing in Syria by blaming the opposition and talking a great deal about the threat from terrorism. Everyone in this Chamber agrees that Da'esh and Al-Nusra are terrorists and must be defeated. That is not the question. But Russia and the regime are not bombing terrorists; they are bombing all forms of opposition and killing hundreds every month. They collaborate with sectarian Shia militias and with Hizbullah — a terrorist organisation in the eyes of many members of the Council and the Arab League — to inflict their own terror on Syria's civilian population.

Let us not forget that Al-Assad's regime, supported by Russia, has killed far more civilians in Syria than Da'esh and Al-Nusra put together. So every time we rightly condemn Da'esh and Al-Nusra terrorism in Syria, let us also condemn the absolute terror being inflicted on the Syrian people by the Al-Assad regime and by Russia as they continue to bomb Syrian civilians day and night. Because the Syrian people will never forget the death and destruction that the sectarian Al-Assad regime has unleashed upon them, nor will they forget that Russia aided and abetted that ruthless sectarian dictator in waging war against his own people. They also will not forget that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, failed to stop the bombing, failed to stop the chlorine and failed to stop the starvation.

So let us be clear. It is Russia's actions in Syria and in the Council that have caused that failure; it is Russia's actions that have prolonged the conflict and prolonged the suffering. It is Russia's four vetoes in the past five years that have prevented Council unity and brought shame on us all, and brought its diplomacy into disrepute.

So the Council must now do more than demand or urge; we must now decide. What can we do to enforce an immediate end to the bombardment of Aleppo and other civilian areas in Syria? We must decide what we can do now to end the sieges and the chokehold that is preventing aid getting in. And in doing so, we must speak loudly and clearly that there will be accountability for these crimes and so many more, including the barbaric, despicable use of chemical weapons by the regime against its own people. That is the only way to stop the suffering, and it is the only way for Russia to atone for its deplorable actions in Syria.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This is the sixth year that the Syrian people have endured a terrible tragedy. In 2011, in Washington, D.C., and various other Western capitals, the decision was made to continue reshaping the geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa, a process that had started with the criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the United States and the United Kingdom. They continued to swing an axe in both Libya and Syria and did not shrink from accepting support from terrorist groups. The inevitable consequences — the disintegration of both countries and the creation of millions of refugees — were written off as an unforeseen nuisance.

The result is that hundreds of armed groups are active in Syria, the country is being bombed by anyone who feels like it and restoring peace has become almost impossible. Months of work by Russian and United States experts under the direction of Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State of the United States, along with the involvement of the Presidents of both countries, resulted in a detailed plan, set out in documents finalized on 9 September, which if carried out in good faith could have enabled us to calm the situation on the ground, significantly improve the humanitarian situation and kick-start a resumption of intra-Syrian negotiations under United Nations auspices. Thanks to sabotage on the part of an intractable opposition, the plan's implementation was endlessly delayed. Our agreements had a lot of opponents and, sadly, we have begun to feel that their unconstructive position has outweighed the desire for peace and common sense.

The United States has in fact admitted its inability to exert any influence over the groups under its patronage, and thus to genuinely fulfil our agreements, which above all entail distinguishing the moderate groups from the terrorists and truly effect such a separation on the ground. That was written down in black and white in all the documents. But nothing has been done. Even the issue of defining terrorist groups has produced nothing but wondering, suggesting that the main aim continues to be protecting the military capacity of the opponents of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, whoever they may be. Unscrupulous methods and exceedingly dubious allies have been useful in that regard.

New conditions and ultimatums that change with dizzying speed are constantly being issued. Requests for a ceasefire, sometimes for 48 hours, sometimes for 72, are constant. We have always met them halfway, or at least tried to, and reached agreement with the Syrian Government. But in the end what has happened is that the militants have regrouped, received reinforcements and launched new offensives. After that came the demand that a precondition was that the Syrian Government should unilaterally halt its air-force flights. First they said it would be for three days, and we agreed to that. Then they said no, that the President of the United States had changed his mind and it had to be seven days, although it was not clear why. Such tactical tricks cannot go on forever. We are not going to agree to any unilateral steps any more.

The bombardment by the so-called coalition forces, reported in this case to be British aircraft, of the Syrian army positions defending the Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor from the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, was a serious blow to the agreements. There was a real danger that the terrorists would capture the city, leading inevitably to the slaughter of civilians. Fortunately, the Syrian armed forces, assisted by the Russian air force, succeeding in averting that potential tragedy. Needless to say, that also created a threat to the ceasefire, but Damascus displayed enviable restraint in that regard.

Since my colleagues — understandably — have talked about the situation in which a humanitarian convoy was shelled, I naturally have something to say about it, too. There are two aspects to this.

First, I would like to note that here in New York we first heard about it from the United States Secretary of State, who said, in a private conversation, that they had received intelligence that, for a few minutes, two Russian aircraft had been somewhere not far from the area where the humanitarian convoy had been travelling and where it was attacked. But he said that

we should not worry and that they were not going to make the information public, since it had to be further investigated. As usual, however, there were leaks from various Washington agencies a few minutes later, and the following day the Secretary of State made the tragedy a centrepiece of his dramatic statement in the Security Council (see S/PV.7774). That is the kind of way we have to work with our American colleagues.

Secondly, we said from the very beginning that everything should be investigated. This was because at first there were reports of artillery shelling, but after that there was talk of helicopters and, later, aircraft. I am not a military expert, but today I read somewhere that the bombing allegedly lasted seven hours. But if the Russian planes were somewhere in the area for a few minutes, could bombs have been falling on the convoy for seven hours? I do not think so. We should therefore investigate that. By the way, our Western counterparts promised to inform us two months ago about their investigation of the bombardment of the Syrian city of Manbij, in which it was reported that more than 100 civilians had been killed, apparently by French aircraft. But neither our French colleagues nor the American coalition leaders have been in a hurry to tell us about the conclusions of that investigation, which they promised to conduct two months ago.

I now return to Aleppo. The humanitarian situation there could have been normalized as long ago as August. But we were prevented in this by the armed groups, which, with the implicit sanction of their outside sponsors, continued to dictate the operational conditions and fire on the humanitarian corridors. We were close to a breakthrough even in September. The Government withdrew its forces to the agreed-on distances and the authorities set up one of the checkpoints stipulated in the 9 September agreement, with the participation of Syrian Arab Red Crescent personnel, and gave permission for the humanitarian convoy to go through. And once again there ensued militant provocations.

I would just like to explain the situation in eastern Aleppo in a bit more detail. The area is under the control of more than 20 armed groups totalling about 3,500 combatants. The main force consists of about 2,000 units of Jabhat Al-Nusra. They are armed with tanks, armoured vehicles, field artillery and rocket launcher systems, not to mention the homemade so-called hell cannons used to shoot gas cylinders, as well as dozens and dozens of other pieces of military hardware, including heavy weaponry. Needless to say, such hardware is anything but homemade; I believe it continues to be supplied by generous Western patrons with the connivance of the United States leadership of the coalition. That reminds me of an episode to do with Libya, when a question was posed at the congressional hearings held at the end of 2013, at which the United States Secretary of State was present, asking for information about the fact that it was known that some countries had supplied 20,000 tons of arms to Libya, while the United States looked the other way. No doubt the State Department was forced to give Congress that information. We asked for it to be shared with us as well, but we have received nothing, despite the fact that the United States is obliged to do so in order to comply with Security Council resolutions on Libya.

I suggest that the scope of military support to the motley crew in Syria is significantly bigger than it was in Libya. The Government forces' positions and the city's residential areas are being shelled daily and indiscriminately from the eastern districts of Aleppo, with no adjustments or aiming and with a view to inflicting maximum damage. Since 1 September, the shelling from the eastern part of the city has resulted in the deaths of more than 50 troops and 120 civilians. Jabhat Al-Nusra specializes in situating weapon positions in areas where there is significant social infrastructure — pumping stations, power substations, hospitals, schools, mosques — and in densely populated urban areas, thereby turning civilians into human shields for terrorists.

Jabhat Al-Nusra's primary attacks take place to the north, across the Castello Road, and the south-west, through the Ramousa district, with the aim of breaching the Government's defences and creating a corridor for the passage of reserves, weapons and ammunition, often in the guise of humanitarian aid. By the way, our American colleagues told us long ago that Al-Nusra was not present in Aleppo but only somewhere in the South. Eventually they admitted that it also had a presence in the North, but that they were going to let us know what the situation was there. Al-Nusra is in fact the main military force there. According to the information we have, more than 80 per cent of the population in the city's eastern districts supports lifting the siege through peaceful negotiations and is asking the terrorists to leave the city. Some of the volunteer opposition militias in Aleppo have been trying to find an opportunity to

negotiate with the Government, but Jabhat Al-Nusra has been firmly suppressing such sentiments.

Since 1 September, seven mass executions have been recorded of those who supported negotiations or tried to leave the city. On 19 September, 26 men and teenagers who had refused to take up arms in support of Al-Nusra were shot dead in front of residents of the Sheikh Hader neighbourhood. We have seen mass exoduses along the seven humanitarian corridors created by Russia and the Syrian Government, which speak to the savage reprisals that have been made against civilians. As they leave, the civilians receive humanitarian aid. More than 4,000 civilians and about 300 fighters have left Aleppo's eastern districts along the corridors since the operation began.

The armed groups have blocked humanitarian access to the city. Since 12 September, Russia, Syria and the United Nations have been trying to ensure the passage of humanitarian convoys to the eastern part of Aleppo using the Castello Road, and measures have been taken to demilitarize it in order to achieve that. The forces along it have been withdrawn twice, on 14 and 16 September. On 17 September, Syrian Red Crescent personnel installed a checkpoint on its western side. The opposition has refused to take the same measures on their side, as stipulated in the Russian-American agreements of 9 September. The illegal Fateh Haleb armed group coalition, the local Aleppo council and the provisional opposition Government have all declared that they would not let aid into the city via the Castello Road, and militants have threatened to attack the convoys. As a result, the humanitarian operation in Aleppo that Russia and the United Nations prepared at the end of August has been wrecked. The militants confiscate food, water and medicines from civilians and force them to work on building defences.

There have been riots in the neighbourhoods of Avvad, Al-Ansari and Sahur, and protests have been brutally suppressed by terrorists using arms. Similarly, more than 200,000 Aleppo residents have been taken hostage by terrorists from Jabhat Al-Nusra and groups affiliated with it, in attempts to use women and children as human shields.

Government forces are protecting the Castello and Ramousa Roads, and those surrounding them, which are strategically important to the city as supply routes. They fire only in response to terrorist attacks and at known and verified targets. They are also combating Al-Nusra's intense efforts to penetrate the city from the south-west and north. In order to try to break through, the terrorists have made active use of suicide bombers in mined cars and armoured troop carriers. More than 40 such attacks have been recorded in Aleppo since 1 August.

Aircraft have been used against militant targets and groups only with the use of air gunners and target illumination. The main objective is to force the terrorists out of the city with a minimum of civilian casualties. The militants are being offered negotiations, and a special northern corridor to the Castello Road has been set up for those exiting with arms. The Russian-American agreements of 9 September provide for a mechanism guaranteeing safe exit for combatants monitored by the United Nations. All those who want amnesty are offered a simplified process for regulation of their status. There are officials from the Russian reconciliation centre in the humanitarian corridor areas whose job it is to monitor the situation and prevent inhumane treatment of militants. Civilians are offered all possible means for leaving the city and getting away from the armed groups, but the terrorists obstruct this.

We are seeing attempts to launch a media campaign to discredit the measures the Government is taking to force out terrorists, using faked or old video, some of it made in western Aleppo. The scale of the operations is exaggerated and the shelling is filmed in the city's abandoned south-western districts, where hostilities have been fierce for more than a month, and made out to be indiscriminate strikes against peaceful parts of eastern Aleppo.

I will now turn to the political process and address myself to Mr. Staffan de Mistura as well as, obviously, to Council members. The political process must be resumed. Frankly, we do not understand why there has been no decisive action in that regard since May. In that regard, I would like to recall that paragraph 9 of the first statement of the International Syria Support Group provided that

> "[t]he participants together with the United Nations will explore modalities for, and implementation of, a nationwide ceasefire to be initiated on a date certain and in parallel with this renewed political process."

What that means is that continuing the political process is a fundamental condition that would have

helped to ensure that the ceasefire was established and complied with.

I would like to ask Mr. De Mistura who it is who has been refusing to engage in direct talks all this time? We know the answer, but I would like to hear it from his lips. Perhaps it is time to stop dancing around the irresponsible politicians who pretend to represent the interests of the Syrian people. If they do not want to conduct negotiations, let them go back to the foreign capitals where they have found a haven. We should bring forward those representatives of the Syrian opposition who really want to lead their country out of the crisis, and we know they exist.

And of course there is the ceasefire. We would like it to remain our goal, along with the resumption of negotiations. I want to stress once again that we can talk about restoring the ceasefire only on the basis of a collective approach, one in which it is not we who have to unilaterally prove anything to anyone but rather up to others to convince us of their sincere desire to dissociate the opposition cooperating with the American-led coalition from Jabhat Al-Nusra. After that, Jabhat Al-Nusra must be beaten and the opposition made part of the political process. If they fail to convince us, that will only increase our suspicions that all this was done to take the heat off Jabhat Al-Nusra. The only way out, therefore, is through honest, joint work to enable every side to implement the ceasefire agreements rather than pushing unilateral demands about whom to offer gestures of goodwill in the hope of profiting from it down the road.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing.

The clashes in the areas of Syria under discussion have recently escalated, resulting in heavy civilian casualties, and a United Nations humanitarian assistance convoy has been attacked. China is very concerned about this. We regret the fact that Syrian Government forces were hit by an airstrike and suffered casualties, and hope that all the parties concerned will improve their coordination and prevent such incidents from happening again.

The Syrian conflict has persisted for more than five years now. China is deeply sympathetic to the suffering of the Syrian people and believes that the situation cannot be allowed to continue. Right now, the priority is for all parties in Syria to work to effectively implement the Security Council resolutions on the Syrian issue. The international community should pursue all four tracks of a ceasefire, political negotiations, humanitarian aid and cooperation against terrorism, in order to facilitate the finding of a solution to the question of Syria.

China hopes that the agreement reached between the Russian Federation and the United States regarding the cessation of hostilities among all Syrian parties will be successfully implemented so as to create opportunities to improve the situation on the ground. The international community should work in collaboration to urge all parties in Syria to effectively implement the agreement in order to resume the ceasefire as soon as possible.

The more complex the situation in Syria, the more important it is to uphold the general direction of political settlement, give full play to the United Nations in its role as the main channel of mediation, continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura, relaunch the Geneva talks as soon as possible, and press ahead on a Syrian-owned and -led political process so as to achieve arrangements that accommodate all interests. Countries of the region should play a positive role in promoting a political settlement in Syria.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is becoming more and more precarious with each passing day. All parties in Syria must provide full humanitarian access and ensure that humanitarian supplies can be delivered in a timely and safe manner. The international community should continue to scale up its humanitarian assistance to Syria so as to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground, provide assistance to neighbouring countries and help them in hosting refugees.

Counter-terrorism is a very important component of any solution to the situation in Syria. The Syrian conflict has led to the rise and spread of terrorism. Unless we root it out, there will be no peace for the Syrian people and no security for regional countries. The international community should work with resolve to combat all terrorist forces listed by the Security Council, including the Islamic State. In the process of international counter-terrorism cooperation, we must enhance intelligence-sharing, prevent and stop social media from spreading extremist ideology, and cut off the flow of terrorists and their channels of financing.

China has made unremitting efforts to promote a political settlement in Syria, and stepped up its efforts to urge all parties to end the conflict as soon as possible and achieve a comprehensive political solution. China

stands ready to play a constructive role in promoting a full, just and appropriate settlement in Syria.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has always maintained that the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria must be based on respect for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of the country, bearing in mind the legitimate Government as a key figure in the process. In the midst of this bloody and prolonged conflict, the cessation of hostilities agreement announced on 9 September by the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group was welcomed positively, yet cautiously, with a view to paving the way for greater understanding in pursuit of peace and stability in Syria.

Unfortunately, it must be said that the United States-led coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant took military action last weekend against the Syrian army, jeopardizing the cessation of hostilities agreed to a few days earlier. Venezuela condemns and laments the inexplicable attack on positions of the Syrian Arab Army carried out by American, British and Australian aircraft, manned by the aforementioned coalition, on 17 September. The attack was followed by a ground offensive launched by Da'esh in an effort to make headway on the ground. At the high-level meeting on Syria on Wednesday, 21 September (see S/PV.7774), United States Secretary of State, John Kerry said the attack was a mistake. We have to say that it seriously undermined the cessation of hostilities and the fragile trust between the parties. This is especially grave in the light of the fact that, as we all know, the city of Deir ez-Zor and its 250,000 inhabitants is besieged by Da'esh and is being defended only by a Syrian military contingent.

This unfortunate attack was immediately followed by another attack against humanitarian aid convoys heading to the city of Aleppo, resulting in the deaths of humanitarian workers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. This was an appalling act against humanitarian staff who, in the adverse conditions of war, carry out the noble duty of providing aid to civilians in need of humanitarian assistance. We reiterate that such people cannot be viewed as military targets, which is why all attacks directed towards them have international criminal consequences. Furthermore, we hope that premature conclusions will not be drawn regarding the perpetrators of this attack, and that the facts will undergo a thorough investigation.

Without a doubt, these two regrettable events have sparked an escalation in the conflict and led to attacks on both sides. Added to all of this is suffering, which is what matters most in a country whose entire institutional framework has been severely impacted by the war waged on it by terrorists and their alliances, who refuse to accept self-evident truths. Any decision about the fate of Syria and its Government belongs solely and exclusively to the Syrian people, since the solution to the conflict and its differences can be reached only through political dialogue and negotiation. That is why armed confrontation and foreign intervention are doomed to failure and only damage the prospects for peace and stability in the region. That was tragically manifest in the horrific events in Libya and Iraq, brother countries left forlorn and blood-stained by military interventions and interference of foreign Governments.

Given that the main enemy in the region and country is terrorism, a genuine commitment to peace requires that the moderate opposition end its relationship of convenience with Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and the recently created Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. The latter seeks to disguise its terrorist acts by aligning itself with moderate opposition groups so as to continue receiving the political and military support of other countries. However, the abdominal images of the atrocities committed by these so-called moderate opposition groups against the civilian population of Aleppo — such as is the beheading of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy among the sadism, laughter and mockery of the combatants of the so-proclaimed moderate opposition — are still fresh in our memory.

Our country shares the widespread concern over the humanitarian situation in Syria. It is a catastrophe. There have been major violations of international law and in the protection of civilians in Aleppo. We are alarmed by the loss of human life and that the situation on the ground may threaten the progress achieved since the cessation of hostilities. However, we believe that convening this emergency meeting only to turn it into political propaganda against the Russian Federation and the Syrian Government contributes in no way to restoring trust among the parties or to alleviating the humanitarian situation, much less to supporting efforts on the ground to resume negotiations and the a potential ceasefire.

We believe that the Security Council must shoulder its enormous responsibilities in this conflict in terms of maintaining international security and peace. Furthermore, regardless of the differences among its members or their own national positions, the Council must support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, in his efforts to resume political negotiations and pursue a path towards peace that includes the legitimate Government of President Bashar Al-Assad throughout the entire long and complex process.

Lastly, we must not give up. The Syrian people have hope for and trust in the United Nations to move forward in restoring peace to their long-suffering country.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet again today to make our statements and stress our various positions on the Syrian crisis, which has lasted for over five years. Regrettably, this meeting is being held against the backdrop of continued differences between regional and international Powers with influence on the ground, which have thus far failed to realize that the only party bearing the brunt of this crisis is the Syrian people, particularly Syrian mothers who have had to choose between letting their children face great danger on the high seas rather or having them stay with them at home.

We have held several meetings in New York in the past few days on the crisis in Syria, both in the Security Council and in the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). All have agreed on two major points: first and foremost, that we all recognize that the war in Syria is a proxy war and that stopping the bloodshed is up to the forces taking part in military operations, whether directly or indirectly; and, secondly, that the implementation of the recent agreement between Russia and the United States on a cessation of hostilities is the only available opportunity to achieve a ceasefire and restart the political process before it is too late.

I will not speak at length, as the assessment of the current situation is glaringly clear. However, I would like to express my regret that the co-Chairs of the ISSG have thus far failed to implement their agreement. We would also like to express our surprise and regret with regard to the differing accounts of what is taking place on the ground at this critical juncture, although the United States and Russia both possess the necessary technological prowess to monitor the situation.

I once again call upon them both to set aside their rivalries and political differences in order to bear their responsibilities and focus on coordinating their bilateral cooperation to implement the cessation of hostilities, without any media confrontations that may be used by some to aggravate the situation and kill all hope for a political process.

I also call upon all Powers with an ability to influence the conflict and the battles taking place on the ground to support the implementation of the agreement between Russia and the United States in good faith. I also call upon Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to prepare for the relaunching of direct negotiations among the Syrian parties as soon as possible, without preconditions by any of those parties.

This is a wake-up call: hundreds of thousands have died and millions have been displaced. The time has come for us all to think first and foremost of the interests of the Syrian people. This must be done free of narrow interests, political aspirations or acts of external polarization on the part of those that have never cared for Syria, which have served to destroy the country and open the door to armed groups and terrorist organizations, allowing them to infiltrate Syria and impose their will.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank France, the United Kingdom and the United States for calling this meeting. It was necessary that the Security Council meet today, given the worsening situation. We are facing the most intensive wave of air strikes since the war in Syria began. I thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his work and for his refusal to throw in the towel.

Our first message can only be a firm condemnation of the brutality of the attacks that have taken place in recent days. The rejection of the cessation of hostilities by the Al-Assad regime and its declared intention to take over eastern Aleppo through assault certainly contravenes every resolution of the Security Council regarding this conflict. In the face of this challenge, the international community has the responsibility to take urgent measures. It is now up to those members of the Security Council with direct influence on the Al-Assad government, the Russian Federation in particular, to put an end to the escalation of violence in Aleppo. Despite the very serious nature of the situation, Spain continues to believe that it is still possible to find a way

out of this conflict through diplomatic means: we are with Staffan.

There are three key steps upon which we — the International Syria Support Group and the Security Council — must concentrate our efforts: first, guaranteeing a ceasefire; secondly, ensuring humanitarian access; and, thirdly, creating the necessary conditions to resume United Nations mediation. Spain therefore supports the proposal put forward by the United States to put an end to the air strikes. We continue to trust that it could serve as a basis for a new agreement between the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group.

We support that proposal primarily because we believe that our priority should be on the humanitarian community, which requires minimum measures of confidence so that the conveyance of aid to Aleppo can resume. But we support it as well because we are aware of the importance of separating the opposition from terrorist groups. As highlighted by our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Mr. García-Margallo, here a few days ago (see S/PV.7774), it is important to draw the line and make it clear to the opposition that the time has come to make a choice, to decide which side they are on, without any ambiguity.

We are open to considering options to improve the supervision of the cessation of hostilities, as proposed by France. However, the most urgent matter is to put an end to the fighting, in particular the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, the besieging of citizens uninvolved in the conflict and the destruction of critical buildings and infrastructure necessary for the survival of the inhabitants of Aleppo.

I conclude with a reference to the attack against the United Nations/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy on 19 September. This is not just another serious attack against civilians in recent days, but also a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law that cannot go unpunished. We will attentively follow the conclusions of the investigation opened by the Secretary-General in order to demand accountability to an adequate extent.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and for his stated determination not to give up on his mission, in which he has our full support.

We deeply regret that this meeting is being held due to such a negative turn of events in Syria, with the collapse of the ceasefire agreement, renewed air strikes and general fighting in the city of Aleppo. The devastating effects of the latest escalation of fighting on the civilian population cannot be overstated. It is deeply regrettable that the United States and the Russian Federation have been unable to effectively implement their coordinated agreement on a cessation of hostilities and collective action against the terrorist groups operating in Syria.

We share the frustration of most Council members. We were led to believe that the International Syria Support Group would be a more effective mechanism for spearheading the Syrian peace process. However, it seems that key stakeholders in the group are pursuing a diplomatic process that is losing credibility on the ground in Syria, here at the United Nations and in the eyes of world public opinion.

The concern that some key opposition groups are cooperating with known terrorist organizations is legitimate. It is essential to distinguish between them. However, indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and facilities cannot be condoned, regardless of whether or not terrorist fighters might be present in those areas. It is also evident that there are elements seeking to undermine the efforts towards a cessation of hostilities and the provision of humanitarian assistance. We believe that it is time for the United States and Russia to involve other relevant stakeholders, including members of the Security Council, in the negotiation process for the modalities of a ceasefire agreement in order to provide a more effective and long-lasting solution to the key concerns that have so far stalled the process.

The Syrian Arab Republic cannot continue being a stage for international rivalries and for a proxy war between regional and international Powers. The political and humanitarian repercussions of the Syrian conflict are likely to hound us for generations to come unless a timely solution is found. Considering that secretive, bilateral negotiations have yielded very poor results in the quest for a final solution to the stalemate, we strongly request that a more open, inclusive approach be taken in order to salvage the prospects for peace and reconciliation and to deliver much-needed humanitarian relief for the civilian population, particularly in the city of Aleppo.

Finally, although in despair, we are ready and willing to join Security Council in responding to Mr. De Mistura's appeal to the Council to push for a cessation of violence and a weekly 48-hour ceasefire pause permitting the provision of humanitarian assistance, press for medical evacuations, and urge a

strong recommitment on the part of the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group to salvage the cessation of hostilities agreement.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): By convening today's emergency meeting on a Sunday, it is our collective conscience that you, Madam, are appealing to. Just some four days after the high-level meeting that was organized here by your country, we meet here once again at the joint request of France, the United States and the United Kingdom, whom I thank for this initiative, to consider once again the untenable situation of the Syrian people, who are victims of a conflict that is completely out of their hands. I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for the first-hand information he has provided us with and for his ongoing commitment to his work, despite calls for his resignation.

The President of Senegal announced here four days ago (see S/PV.7774) that what is happening in Syria is unsustainable. Despite meeting after meeting, negotiation after negotiation, resolution after resolution, under the bombs human lives are destroyed and houses, markets, schools and health-care clinics are destroyed in violation of all international humanitarian rules. Despite the praiseworthy efforts and good will of humanitarian organizations, an entire population is suffering and an entire country is collapsing along with its economy and rich, multi-faith cultural heritage. Here, four days ago, the President of Senegal asked how long this could last. The cessation of hostilities that was obtained through resolution 2268 (2016), and which is critical to the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance and the relaunching of the political process, is now seriously compromised.

Moreover, the hope we had pinned on the recent cessation of hostilities agreement reached between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) — which provided safe humanitarian aid corridors and coordinated action against terrorist groups, in particular the Islamic State and Fatah al-Sham, formerly the Al-Nusra Front — has ultimately been dashed by the large-scale attack on eastern Aleppo. At the high-level meeting on 21 September, Senegal urged the ISSG co-Chairs to ensure the maintenance of the ceasefire. The Senegalese delegation reiterates its support for the establishment of a joint command centre to monitor the situation for as long as the ceasefire is in effect.

Given the serious nature of the situation in Syria, and in particular in Aleppo, Senegal is convinced more than ever that peace in Syria must be underpinned by scrupulous respect for international humanitarian law. That is why we support the three recommendations made by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura: protection of civilian infrastructure, a 48-hour humanitarian relief pause and authorization of medical evacuation. He also told us that several loaded trucks are ready and waiting to go.

We therefore need a strong and lasting consensus among parties in the fight against terrorism, the international community's common enemy. For as long as the Council is divided and the International Syria Support Group is in deadlock, terrorist organizations will continue to thrive in Syria, attracting an increasing number of foreign terrorist fighters and making that country a safe haven for criminal groups. In the light of this sad observation, the Senegalese delegation reiterates its full confidence in Mr. De Mistura's ongoing efforts to seek a political solution to the Syrian crisis. War is not an option.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we talk here, bombs continue to fall in Aleppo. Children continue to die. Women continue to die. The elderly continue to die. Civilian protection, which we always claim to be a State's primary responsibility, does not seem that be much in practice today when we consider the intensification of events taking place in Aleppo.

What is happening is none other than a massacre. That is what occurs when bombs are dropped on the civilian population, medical facilities and schools. Nothing justifies a massacre — absolutely nothing. We thought that we might have been able to relax somewhat on the weekend after we bade farewell to our respective delegations, but last night we were summoned to this meeting. And now we ask, what will the Council do for Syria? What will be the result of our deliberations in the face of this horrendous situation?

Regrettably, I have come to the conclusion that, whatever we say in our respective speeches here to voice our disdain and reiterate our positions on the situation — I could reiterate our call to uphold humanitarian law, protect civilians amid the horror of war and for each sector to shoulder its responsibility — if the ghastly bombing of eastern Aleppo and its civilian population continues, the people there will not end up in the hands of the terrorists, they will simply be

exterminated. I could also reiterate our support for Mr. Staffan de Mistura. When my colleagues in Geneva and I talk about Staffan, we always refer to him as our constant hero. We are fascinated by his constancy and unfathomable optimism.

(*spoke in English*)

He is our constant hero, but he is not a superhero. If Staffan could make progress on his own and — we say this very frankly — if two members of the Security Council — I am referring to the United States and Russia — could resume talks and manage in some way to restore the process, my delegation and others could support it.

Once again, we urge the Russian Federation and the United States to attempt to meet as they have done many times in the past to resume the process. Without them, bombs will continue to be dropped, people will continue to die and the war itself will continue — we know that wars can be interminable — and the horror will continue. We believe that both the Russian Federation and the United States have acted in good faith as they worked together. We believe that many things have occurred to along the way to pull them apart. Nonetheless, following the example of our constant hero, we ask that they display a similar level of constancy and continue to work together because they will certainly find support among the vast majority of the members of the Council to help to gradually restore peace in Syria and give its people a semblance of a normal life.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank the President for having convened today's meeting to discuss, yet again, another numbing development.

Mr. Staffan de Mistura's latest update provides a bleak picture on the challenges that we face in Syria. Just four days ago, we received a strong and clear message from the Secretary-General in this very Chamber, (see S/PV.7774) highlighting our collective failure on Syria. I recall that all Council members, and even the Syrian representative, expressed hope and support for the 9 September agreement between the United States and Russia. Everyone in the Chamber agreed that there is no military solution to the conflict. We are all in agreement on need to abide by the cessation of hostilities, adhere to international law, protect civilians and allow humanitarian deliveries.

Alas, just when we thought that things could not possibly get any worse in Syria, we were gravely mistaken. We are again shocked by callous air strikes against civilians in Aleppo, carried out using incendiary weapons and bunker-buster bombs. Hundreds of people were killed or wounded, many of them children. Babies and children were trapped in the rubble and crushed to death. Nearly 2 million people are left desperately without access to running water as the city's main water pumping station was destroyed, placing children at the particular risk of water-borne diseases.

Malaysia condemns the latest military escalation in Aleppo, which constitutes a flagrant breach of the agreed cessation of hostilities and seriously undermines the 9 September agreement. The latest acts of aggression dash whatever benefit of the doubt we had accorded to the conflicting parties. It raises questions about the commitment and sincerity in upholding their obligations on the cessation of hostilities.

Malaysia calls on the conflicting parties not to lose sight of peace and to use every window of opportunity to urgently recommit to the 9 September agreement, particularly to cease fighting. I reiterate our demand for the conflicting parties to respect international humanitarian law, including in providing unfettered humanitarian access and in protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including children, relief or rescue personnel, schools and hospitals. I also echo the call by the Secretary-General for independent investigation and accountability on the various acts of atrocities against civilians that may constitute war crimes.

In conclusion, Malaysia views favourably the initiative by France to create a credible and effective monitoring mechanism to oversee and report on the ceasefire and humanitarian access. Malaysia stands ready to engage constructively on that proposal. At this point, we must not give up hope. We must not despair. We need to urgently move beyond verbal condemnations or pronouncements and we need to come up with effective and concrete actions that would make a difference to thousands of Syrian lives on the ground.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the delegations of the United States, United Kingdom and France for the initiative to hold today's briefing, and the presidency for promptly responding to their request. We are also grateful to Special envoy Staffan de Mistura for his candid assessment and his courage.

The latest turn of events is extremely disturbing, especially on the heels of last week's high-level meeting on Syria in this very Chamber (see S/PV.7774). We condemn the decision of Damascus and its allies to stage an offensive against eastern Aleppo. It is a flagrant violation of all relevant Security Council resolutions and the most recent Geneva arrangements. Ukraine is not privy to all the details of the most recent rounds of negotiations among all the parties involved in the Syrian issue. However, what matters in this situation is the fact that the actions of the Syrian regime and its allies go against the very core of international humanitarian law. They violate every fundamental principle of human decency. Is that the state of affairs that the Security Council is prepared to accept as a fact of life, or is it something that the Council can finally master the courage to counter? The latter is dependent, of course, on the political will of just a couple of Council members, first and foremost on Russia.

More than 200 civilians were killed and 300 wounded in the last 48 hours of sustained aerial and ground bombing of besieged eastern Aleppo. It speaks volumes of the true intentions of Bashar Al-Assad and his Russian allies, and there is no doubt that such casualty numbers are not final. We agree with the Secretary-General's comments yesterday on the situation in Syria. We are also appalled by the chilling military escalation in Aleppo. The recent statement by the Syrian delegation at the General Assembly that

> "the victory was even greater because the Syrian army was progressing in the war against terrorism" (*see A/71/PV.16*)

appears particularly cynical and revealing.

Available information on the use of incendiary weapons and advanced munitions, such as bunker-buster bombs, in the ongoing fighting around Aleppo sheds greater light on destructive Russian involvement. Throughout the year, the Ukrainian delegation has repeatedly voiced reservations and doubts about the true nature of Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict. On repeated occasions, we have been proved right — which, by the way, does not make us happy.

In this case, we would have been delighted to have made a mistake. I am not going to repeat what we have said on numerous occasions. I will just say that any hopes of reaching a workable arrangement with Russia and the Al-Assad regime at this moment are misplaced. As long as these two parties are resolutely bound to a military solution, any pause in the fighting, any ceasefire agreement, any political hesitance or unwarranted benefit of the doubt will be mercilessly exploited by the hawks in Damascus and Moscow to improve their military positions and to strengthen their negotiation positions.

As we speak, Russia has just completed redeployment of additional Sukhoi Su-25 jets designed for close air support to Syria. Let us also convey a clear message to those planning to retake eastern Aleppo. The idea that a regime victory would lead to an enforced stability in Syria is a dangerous fantasy. The realization of the so-called Grozny scenario in Syria is not possible and not sustainble. I will remind the council that Grozny is the capital of Chechnya, the city that was razed to the ground by the Russian military in 1994 and 1995 during the First Chechen War. Those days, the Russian military commanders used to say that it was aimed to force terrorists out of the city with minimal casualties among civilians. Sounds familiar, does it not? If recent history is any guide, there are no prospects for a military solution in Syria. Those who think otherwise will have to face consequences of their actions on the battlefield and international arena alike. Is it worth more and more Syrian lives? I doubt it.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I thank you, Madam, for convening this meeting. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his detailed briefing. Last week, the week of 19 September, was the high-level week for the General Assembly. It should have been a breakthrough for the crisis in Syria. We had already welcomed the agreement reached on 9 September between the United States and the Russian Federation.

We expected that the reduction in violence would allow for expanded and unimpeded humanitarian access and the resumption of the political process. Instead, this year's high-level week began with the shocking news from Oram Al-Kubra in rural Aleppo. A warehouse of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and a United Nations-SARC aid convey were attacked. Japan extends its sincere condolences to the families of all humanitarian workers killed while doing their invaluable work in Syria. Japan calls upon the United Nations to investigate this incident and to release the results publicly. Furthermore, Japan calls upon all of the relevant stakeholders to ensure the security of

humanitarian aid workers who engage in humanitarian assistance in Syria.

The results of the escalation of the fighting in Aleppo during the past few days is reported to have been extremely devastating. We express our deepest concern about the situation on the ground. Protection and access must be achieved urgently. A particularly serious test for humanitarian access will arrive on Monday. Humanitarian convoys scheduled to deliver items to eastern Aleppo are sitting at the Turkey-Syria border but the food supplies will soon expire. We strongly urge the Syrian Government, opposition groups, and all States that have influence on them to work to enable these trucks to enter into eastern Aleppo.

We all share the view that only an immediate ceasefire can alleviate this devastating situation. Without a ceasefire, the increase to humanitarian access, the protection of civilians, and the resumption of the political process will never be attained. The important thing now is to get the agreement between Russia and the United States back on track. In light of the horrible intensification of the fighting and the catastrophic humanitarian situation, we must overcome our differences and unite to halt this breathtaking tragedy.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of New Zealand.

As our colleague from Senegal reminded us, it is only four days since my Prime Minister convened a meeting in this Chamber (see S/PV.774), at which leaders agreed upon several points. They agreed that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. They agreed on the urgent need to stop the fighting and to put our combined efforts behind ensuring the arrangement between the United States and Russia to restore the cessation of hostilities. They agreed that the Syrian people had suffered far too much and that full, unhindered humanitarian assistance for those in need was essential, and they agreed on the need to create the conditions for the resumption of political talks.

Our leaders did not agree on everything pretend there were any easy solutions, but they did agree, at least, on this much. It is therefore with utter dismay that we find ourselves back in this Chamber as Syrian planes, reportedly with Russian support, inflict carnage on eastern Aleppo. These actions, which reportedly include the use of incendiary and other indiscriminate weapons, are disturbing and demonstrate total disregard for their devastating impact on civilians. But what is most appalling is that these actions are shattering any remaining hopes we had for maintaining the cessation of hostilities and getting the peace processes back on track.

As my Prime Minister made clear in this Chamber a few days ago, words are not enough. All those who claim to support peace must back words with action. My delegation demands that the Syrian Government immediately ceases bombing of civilians and demonstrates genuine commitment to achieving a negotiated peace, and we appeal to all those genuinely committed to a political solution to do the same, especially those with the greatest influence on the Syrian Government.

I speak in particular to those whose political and material support is making the Syrian Government's current actions possible. That support is undermining any remaining prospects for the peace process and it is destroying innocent lives under the guise of countering terrorism. The Syrian Government needs to ground its planes, hold back its armies, and honour its commitments under resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). New Zealand appeals to the Government of Russia and to Iran, too. If they are serious about peace, they should do everything in their power in the coming days to halt the fighting and give the United States-Russia arrangement a chance. We recognize that the opposition, too, has responsibilities.

All those with influence over the opposition must encourage it to respect the ceasefire and disassociate itself from terrorist groups. However, what the Syrian Government and its allies are doing is making that disassociation harder and prolonging the war. All those involved in Syria need to take a hard look at themselves and ask whether they intend to be genuine collaborators in the search for peace. So, we too join other Council members in putting our full support behind Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria Staffan de Mistura's request and calls on the Council — his call for the support, his call for the cessation of hostilitiesand putting protection of civilians as a priority, the 48-hour pauses and medical evacuations.

We admire Mr. De Mistura's determination and his belief that the current course of events can be turned. For New Zealand's part, we will do what we can to find a common cause in the Council for action to enforce the cessation of hostilities in Syria, as he has asked of us. A

continuation of this conflict benefits no one, certainly not Syrian civilians.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): A colleague of the three States that called to convene this meeting — namely, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom — mentioned that my country, Syria, is broken and moribund. I would like to reassure him that my country has never been broken and will never be broken. His words are tantamount to the dream of Satan to ascend to Paradise. These are mere mixed dreams that cannot be interpreted and they are meaningless. They are not worthy of a permanent member of the Security Council. As for the three permanent members together, they sounded as if they were reinventing the wheel when they said that the Syrian Government was trying to recapture Aleppo. What a great discovery! As if Aleppo were a town in Djibouti or Afghanistan — or in Brazil, for that matter. I reassure them that the Syrian Government will recapture the entire city of Aleppo. If the countries' of the permanent members of the Security Council each have one capital, we have two capitals, Damascus and Aleppo.

If Shakespeare or the pioneers of the Theatre of the Absurd, Jean Genet, Adamov, Kafka, Kierkegaard and Georges Shehadeh, were to come to life again, they would have written better tragedies and better plays than they did in their time. They would never have even heard the kind of lies that were told to King Lear. Some of them are mourning the deaths of the very persons whom they killed with their own hands. They weep crocodile tears. Thirteen times, the same three permanent members that called for this urgent meeting have aborted a presidential statement that would have condemned terrorist car bombs and suicide bombers as well as erroneous strikes by their own forces. Thirteen times, those countries aborted the adoption of a mere presidential statement condemning a terrorist act in Syria. They have also foiled the efforts of our friends in the Council to adopt resolutions condemning terrorism. But when a lone French terrorist named Mohammed Merah wreaked havoc in the French city of Toulouse, he was killed by 300 bullets at the hands of elite French forces. And good riddance. But no one in Syria or elsewhere ever called that French terrorist a member of a moderate armed opposition group. Nor do we refer to terrorists that way in the United States or other places. Even if Spain were to give away the Basque region — or France Corsica or Great Britain Scotland or the United States California or Texas — the Syrian Government would never relinquish one inch of its territory, as laid down in its Constitution and in international law.

Once again, the Council is meeting today at the request of a number of members who are attempting to rescue the armed terrorist groups that they falsely classify them as the moderate armed opposition. They do that whenever indications point to the possibility that these groups, under attack from the Syrian Arab Army and their allies, face defeat. They overlooked the crime committed by the Nur al-Din al-Zanki rebel group when they beheaded Abdullah Issa, a Palestinian child, before the eyes of the world. At that time, that rebel group, together with the Al-Nusra Front, was in control of the Handarat Palestinian refugee camp in Aleppo. We believe that the call for this urgent meeting is a message from the countries that called it to the Al-Nusra Front and the other terrorist groups, namely, that their support and political cover will continue unhindered, and that the weapon of terrorism as a means of political pressure on the Syrian Government and its allies is still viable.

It is the constitutional responsibility of the Syrian Government to protect our citizens from the acts of armed terrorist groups that have inflicted suffering on our people in Aleppo, a responsibility similar to that of other Council members. The Syrian Army and its allies began the military operation two days ago, specifically after the end of the so-called seven-day halt to military operations, in the wake of the failure of the so-called truce. They made every effort to protect civilians, advising them to stay away from the armed terrorist groups in neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo. The Army made every effort to give civilians a safe exit and to provide them with housing and the basic necessities of life, including for those who had been deceived into taking up arms against the State. By contrast, the armed terrorist groups continued to prevent civilians from leaving eastern Aleppo, with the intention of using them as human shields. We know that there are 2 million inhabitants of Aleppo, 1.75 million of whom are living under the authority of the State in areas controlled by the State, while 275,000 are

hostages living under duress in eastern Aleppo, which is controlled by the Al-Nusra Front and its allies.

In that context, my country condemns the use of internationally prohibited weapons. We stress that all military operations conducted by the Syrian Army and its allies on Syrian territory abide by the Charter of the United Nations and international laws, and are consistent with the Council's resolutions on combating terrorism. In that respect, my Government denounces the fabricated accusations levelled by certain members of the Council and the most senior United Nations officials against the Syrian Army and its allies through alleging that they use internationally prohibited weapons or that they deliberately target civilians. Such false accusations by the most senior Secretariat officials will ensure that this international Organization will meet the same fate as the League of Nations. Such irresponsible behaviour will bring it down.

It is indeed bewildering that the Secretary-General and his senior aides should make such false accusations based on fabricated testimony given by terrorists. And this is while ignoring incontrovertible evidence that armed terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), have used chemical weapons dozens of times against military personnel and civilians and that ISIL has seized a chlorine gas factory situated 40 miles from Aleppo.

I have just received information to the effect that terrorists disguised as Syrian military personnel are plotting to use toxic chemicals, including yellow phosphorus, against Syrian civilians. The aim of the operation of these terrorists, dressed in Syrian military fatigues, is to fake photographs and videos that suggest that these crimes were committed by the Syrian military. That is exactly what they are now doing with pictures of the little boy named Omran and other victims. They are the victims of their terrorism, and the aim of the photographs is to blackmail the Council and world opinion. Those toxic chemical materials are located in a garbage dump outside the city of Suraqeb, north of Aleppo. The toxic material is 20 kilometres from Idlib, buried 12 metres underground in a depot containing six barrels of it. On 6 September, the warehouse housing yellow phosphorous material was visited by two female United States experts, who then left for Turkey.

This is a proof to the Security Council, like other tens of letters we have conveyed to this organ in connection with terrorist activities in my country.

Those who commit war crimes in Syria are well-known. They are the ones who killed more than 200 civilians in the town of Manbij, bombed a school for the deaf in Raqqa and targeted the Syrian army in Deir ez-Zor, in support of Da'esh, and who for the past several years have been providing all kinds of support for the tens of thousands of terrorists who have been brought to Syria from more than 100 countries, according to the Council's own reports.

My Government has a keener interest than anyone else in putting an end to the bloodshed in Syria and to the prolonged suffering of the Syrian people. Accordingly, we welcomed the United States-Russia agreement on fighting the two terrorist groups Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front and their allies — distinguishing between the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and the so-called genetically modified moderate armed opposition groups — and ceasing hostilities for one week. While we were committed to the agreement, those who employ terrorist groups in Syria told them to reject it. More than 20 armed terrorist groups immediately rejected it, including the Ahrar Al-Sham, Nur al-Din al-Zanki and the Al-Nusra Front. That rejection was accompanied by targeting the Syrian Army on the Castello Road and at various other positions. They violated the agreement 300 times before it expired, leading to the martyrdom of 200 civilians and 157 military personnel, as well as to hundreds of seriously injured victims.

In a premeditated attempt to sabotage and bury the agreement before it began, the military aircraft of the so-called international coalition led by the United States bombarded the positions of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces fighting Da'esh in the area of Mount Thardeh in Deir ez-Zor. The terrorists seized a humanitarian assistance convoy in the Aleppo suburbs and set fire to it. As usual, this was accompanied by a fabricated media and political campaign that accused the Syrian Army and its allies of committing the crime. That was not the first time that these groups have committed such horrific crimes.

It is truly deplorable that certain members of the Council, in addition to the most senior United Nations officials, including the Secretary-General, continue to call on the Syrian Government and its allies to adhere to the cessation of hostilities — despite all kinds of evidence on the ground proving that since the beginning, those countries have been backing armed terrorist groups, which have never wanted and will never want this endeavour to succeed.

That was made abundantly clear by the violations of the agreement by the armed terrorist groups and the so-called international coalition. Worse still, the United States shirked the responsibility for its main obligation, namely, to differentiate between the Al-Nusra Front and those groups that it insists on classifying as moderate armed opposition groups. That avoidance of responsibility has aborted all the progress achieved over five years towards ending the war of terror imposed on our country, and clearly demonstrates a lack of political will on the part of those who sponsor terrorism to stop the bloodshed — as if the objective were to neutralize the Syrian forces fighting terrorism, especially the Syrian Air Force, instead of finding a solution to the crisis.

With the terrorist war now entering its sixth year, is it not time for certain members of the Council to stop deceiving themselves and public opinion by insisting on protecting and supporting what they refer to at times as the moderate opposition, at others as the moderate armed opposition and at still others as non-State armed groups? All such groups are only one side of the same coin — terrorism — which has had a boomerang effect, through attacks, terrorist activities and the propagation of extremist ideologies in those members' capitals, owing to their flawed policies and practices, which they continue to advocate against my country to this day. Would any representative in this Chamber dare to justify the support given by some for four years in the form of hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weaponry to Nur al-Din al-Zanki, the terrorists who beheaded that Palestinian child, an event that the Security Council has lamented today? That terrorist group, whose name demonstrates that it is an agent of the Turkish regime, exposed the political media campaigns and claims aimed at portraying it as a moderate opposition group when it announced that it was operating under the authority of the terrorist organization the Al-Nusra Front.

My country will remain committed to its national constitutional duty to combat terrorism in all its forms. It is now incumbent on certain members of the Council and other members of the international community to end their exploitation of the Syrian people's suffering, which they have created themselves through their military, political and financial support for armed terrorist groups. The politicization of the humanitarian crisis, aimed at achieving ends that have nothing to do with humanity or the interests of the Syrian people, will lead only to a prolongation of the crisis and of the plight of Syrian people, as well as a proliferation of terrorism that threatens international peace and security.

Our commitment to fighting terrorism goes hand in hand with our commitment to reaching a political solution through intra-Syrian talks through which the Syrians shall decide the future of their country without any foreign intervention. Solutions imposed from outside are totally rejected by the Syrian people.

With regard to solutions imposed from abroad, they are completely and categorically rejected by the Syrian Government. In that regard, I must emphasize that any political solution can be successful only if it provides the necessary support and circumstances that will enable it to be implemented through efforts to combat terrorism and to continue national reconciliation, which has already succeeded in many areas.

Finally, everyone must realize that the real war against terrorism has not yet begun. The victory of the Syrian Government and its allies over terrorism is inevitable. That victory will be part of the Security Council's resolutions on combating terrorism and in the maintenance of international peace and security.

I would like to conclude by saying that the Syrian Air Force has air-dropped assistance to the residents of Deir ez-Zor, the city that fell victim to the terrorism of ISIL in the wake of the bombing by the United States Air Force of the Syrian army bases that protected it.

The President: I now again give the floor to Mr. De Mistura to respond to Council members' comments.

Mr. De Mistura: I wish to respond to one specific question, which was very precise and clearly raised by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation.

First, I would like to reply that I am guided by the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and by resolution 2254 (2015), both with regard to the agenda and the invitations. I have in the past — and this is my reply — witnessed refusals for active direct talks from the High Negotiations Committee, which set preconditions. I asked the Ambassador of Syria, who was also the representative of the Syrian Government in Geneva, whether the Syrian delegation wanted to have at that time direct talks with the delegations that were present at the times. The Ambassador of Syria — I ask him to correct me if I am wrong — indicated that he did not want to discuss with terrorists or representatives of terrorists or participants in terrorism. I can confirm

that I will send the invitations. Obviously, the political process cannot be held hostage by the security environment.

At the same time, let me recall what was stated in that regard. On that special day — I consider 9 September a special day, or evening rather — there was a long and very detailed discussion between the Russian Federation and the United States. At that time, I made a statement on behalf of the United Nations in which I said the following:

> "The United Nations hopes that the implementation of this understanding will facilitate without preconditions renewed efforts to reach a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political settlement of the conflict, as called for by the Geneva communiqué and by resolution 2254 (2015). I will then proceed to consult with the Secretary-General and the International Syria Support Group in order to be able to launch it."

That is still my hope. I can therefore confirm that when I send the invitations, as per resolution 2254 (2015), I will do that for direct talks.

The President: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to make a simple clarification and to comment about what the Special Envoy has just said.

At the Vienna II conference, held to prepare for Geneva, Jordan was charged with determining who was a terrorist and who was not, and Saudi Arabia was charged with determining who was in the opposition and who was not, so that we could take those two definitions to Geneva with us. Neither Jordan nor Saudi Arabia established such definitions, and the problem was again referred to the Geneva conference. We then found out that terrorists had been invited to the Geneva conference. Afterwards, they were excluded because everyone found out that they were terrorists.

On the other hand, the Syrian Government has been repeatedly to Geneva and will return there to engage in an intra-Syrian dialogue — not a Syrian terrorist dialogue — without outside interference and without any impositions. Therefore, we need the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria to gather all the opposition groups in one delegation, which would come to negotiate with the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic. We are not prepared to negotiate with terrorists, or with hundreds of genetically modified armed terrorist groups. We are a Government that is prepared to negotiate with one united delegation of the national opposition that truly desires an intra-Syrian settlement without outside interference.

We do not consider all members of the opposition terrorists, as was suggested by the statement of the Special Envoy. However, we would like to negotiate with those who believe in Syria and in the future of Syria and the dialogue among Syrians without their being used in the service of external agendas. I reiterate that the Syrian Government is prepared to return to Geneva and to resume the dialogue, but not with the deaf or the mute or the blind. We want to resume the dialogue with Syrian nationals like us who believe in our country and do not serve an external agenda and spend their days in five-star hotels and get paid by Governments who use them in cheap tricks.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.